



Situational Awareness Bulletin

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(U) Marketing Stickers Misread as Threats

(U//FOUO) Scope: The NCRIC has prepared this Situational Awareness Bulletin to inform law enforcement, crisis managers, and private-sector partners about the use of unconventional marketing tools often misconstrued as possible threats because they contain weaponry images. While the NCRIC encourages the diligent reporting of any suspicious sightings, this bulletin is intended to put into context some of the marketing tools that use provocative, seemingly threatening imagery.

(U) Key Findings

- (U//FOUO) Commercial “guerrilla marketing” uses unconventional means to promote products. In an atmosphere of heightened vigilance for suspicious activity, certain types of imagery have the potential to generate false alerts when misinterpreted as indicators of terrorist threats.¹
- (U//FOUO) Although domestic violent extremists, such as Earth Liberation Front (ELF), have used graffiti to communicate threats, terrorist groups are unlikely to use marketing materials to explicitly signal an attack.

(U) Incidents of Note

(U//FOUO) On 11 July 2011, a commercial flight from San Francisco to Germany was diverted to Chicago when a crew member discovered “a sticker with a threatening message” in a lavatory.²

- (U) The sticker, which features a stylized hand grenade, is actually a logo associated with Grenade Gloves Inc., a snowboarding company with a line of gloves, apparel, and footwear aimed at 17 to 24 year olds. While Grenade imagery may appear alarming out of context, it is merely a branding logo. (When Grenade ad copy states, “We’re aiming for world domination at Grenade!”³ they mean product dominance.)



(U) Sticker found in airplane lavatory

(U//FOUO) On 7 July 2011, NCRIC received a tip from a concerned citizen who found a sticker posted outside San Francisco General Hospital. The image combined an AK-47, Arabic-like script, and stated “The Movement is Soon...” An identical sticker was spotted attached to a billboard in the mass transit station at San Francisco’s Civic Center.



- (U//FOUO) Internet searches revealed that the sticker is part of a

(U) Opium promotional sticker

marketing strategy for the hip-hop artist called “Opium” (the name written in the Arabic-appearing script).⁴ Marketing materials for Opium make use of provocative and ominous themes as artistic expressions of his social and political criticism.

(U) Outlook

(U//FOUO) Guerrilla marketing employs unconventional means, seeks provocative reactions that generate buzz, and is unpredictable by definition. In the current climate of heightened vigilance such promotional approaches could again result in false alerts or unintended disruptions, especially if the marketing purpose is not immediately evident.

- (U//FOUO) The most significant false alert of this sort occurred on 31 January 2007, when several battery-powered, magnetic light displays were set up in public locations in Boston without prior publicity or permission. Mistaken for possible explosive devices, authorities moved quickly to isolate the suspicious devices and render them safe. Although the devices were later determined to be a marketing gimmick for a late-night cable television show, the stunt resulted in a costly police response and disruption to transportation systems in the Boston area.⁵



(U) Grenade logo artwork



(U) Massachusetts State Policeman removing a hoax device in 2007

¹ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guerrilla_marketing#Aqua_Teen_Hunger_Force.

² Meredith May, “United SFO Flight Diverts to Chicago after Threat,” *San Francisco Chronicle/SFGate*, 11 July 2011.

³ <http://www.grenadegloves.com/>, accessed 13 July, 2011.

⁴ The sticker is called the “Opium Gucci-AK Logo..T.M.I.S.” See <http://hiphoparabia.net/photo/opium-gucciak-logotmis?context=user>

⁵ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guerrilla_marketing#Aqua_Teen_Hunger_Force.